

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0369

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: CHANGES AT PRESIDENTIAL PRESS OFFICE

REF: CAIRO 8802

1. REPUBLICAN DECREE WAS ISSUED NOV 19 APPOINTING TAHSIN BASHIR TO BE "SUPERVISOR OF PRESS AFFAIRS" AT THE PRESIDENCY. UNTIL SPRING OF 1974, TAHSIN HAD BEEN "ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS COUNSELOR". ON MARCH 21 HE SHIFTED TO MFA AS DIRECTOR OF PRESS AND INFORMATION DEPARTMENT, THEN ON MAY 12 WAS APPOINTED OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN FOR MFA.

2. SINCE TAHSIN MOVED TO MFA IN MARCH, PRESIDENTIAL PRESS OFFICE HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY UNSTAFFED AND TAHSIN HAS CONTINUED TO DO MUCH PRESS LIAISON WORK FOR OFFICE OF PRESIDENCY. HE SAYS THIS HAS BEEN AT PRESIDENT'S REQUEST. ONE MFA OFFICIAL WHO SHOULD KNOW, HOWEVER, TOLD US TAHSIN HAS NOT BEEN HESITANT IN OFFERING HIS SERVICES TO PRESIDENCY WHENEVER WELL-KNOWN JOURNALISTS ARE SCHEDULED TO INTERVIEW PRESIDENT SADAT.

3. TAHSIN'S RETURN TO PRESIDENCY WILL OBVIOUSLY FILL IMPORTANT BUREAUCRATIC GAP. HIS NEW TITLE, "SUPERVISOR", HAS AP-

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PARENTLY BEEN INVENTED FOR HIM. BEFORE BEING ASSIGNED TO

WASHINGTON, ASHRAF GHORBAL HELD THE TITLE OF "PRESIDENTIAL PRESS COUNSELOR" WHICH SOUNDS MORE IMPRESSIVE THAN "SUPERVISOR". ADDRESSEES MAY RECALL PRESIDENTIAL DECREE OF FEB 1, 1974 APPOINTING HAYKAL TO EXACTLY SAME JOB AS GHORBAL HAD HELD, I.E. PRESIDENTIAL PRESS COUNSELOR, AND HAYKAL'S REPORTEDLY INDIGNANT REACTION TO OFFER OF SUCH A LOW RANK.

4. IT WAS ASSUMED LAST FEBRUARY AND IS NO DOUBT STILL TRUE THAT HAYKAL WOULD WISH EITHER SOME UNIQUE PRESIDENCY TITLE OR AN APPOINTMENT AS ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT, A RANK NORMALLY HELD BY EX-PRIME MINISTER LIKE AZIZ SIDQI, OR PROMINENT EGYPTIANS CLOSE TO THE PRESIDENT SUCH AS SAYYD MAR'I. WHEN CAIRO NEWSPAPERS REPORTED HAYKAL MET PRESIDENT SADAT ON NOVEMBER 4 FOR FIRST TIME SINCE HAYKAL'S OUSTER, AKHBAR AND GUMHURIYYA DESCRIBED HIM AS "PRESS COUNSELOR". AHRAH, MOST OF WHOSE STAFF REMAINS LOYAL TO HIM, USED NOT TITLE AT ALL. WE UNDERSTAND HAYKAL HAS, IN FACT, MET PRESIDENT MORE THAN ONCE SINCE THAT DATE AND THAT IT IS NOW CONCEIVABLE HE WILL GET ONE OF JOBS WHICH HE IS REPORTEDLY READY TO ASSUME, PERHAPS REPLACING ABD AL-QADIR HATIM AS HEAD OF DAR AL-AHRAH PUBLISHING HOUSE.

5. WE WERE INTERESTED TO READ ANONYMOUS ARTICLE IN NOV 14 EDITION OF LEBANESE PERIODICAL KULL SHAY' (WHICH WE RECALL EMBASSY BEIRUT HAS DESCRIBED AS "PRO CAIRO" AND THEREFORE PROBABLY A RECIPIENT OF GOE FUNDS) THAT HAYKAL IS CAMPAIGNING TO BECOME EGYPT'S NEXT PRESIDENT. HE IS ALLEGED TO BE EMPHASIZING BOTH HIS SELF-APPOINTED ROLE AS GUARDIAN OF THE NASSER HERITAGE AND HIS CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH WEALTHY LIBYAN REGIME. ALTHOUGH KULL SHAY' IS ONE OF THE PERIODICALS USUALLY AVAILABLE ON CAIRO NEWSSTANDS, THIS ISSUE HAS NOT APPEARED. WE ARE TEMPTED TO SPECULATE THAT THE EDITORS IN BEIRUT MAY NOT HAVE RECEIVED WORD THAT HAYKAL HAS PROVISIONALLY RE-ENTERED THE PRESIDENT'S GOOD GRACES.

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